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DESCRIPTION OF A WINNEBAGO FUNERAL¹

BY OLIVER LAMERE AND PAUL RADIN

ON the first day of June, 1911, there died in Winnebago, Nebraska, Mr J. M., a prominent member of the Winnebago tribe and a member of the Bear clan. In accordance with the old Winnebago customs, the first individual to be notified of the death was Mr J. F., a member of the Wolf clan.² To Mr F. fell the lot of taking charge of all the funeral rites—dressing the deceased, laying his body in the casket, burying him, and finally, of conducting the elaborate funeral wake lasting four nights.

One of Mr F's most important duties is to invite the brave men or warriors³ who play such an all-important part in the wake and

¹ The following description of a Winnebago funeral is based almost entirely on the notes taken by Mr Lamere some months ago, at the funeral of a prominent member of his tribe. Dr Radin's work has been confined to editing these notes and adding additional observations wherever, in his opinion, they were needed for the better understanding of the rites in question.

² According to the Winnebago social organization every clan is paired off with another one, which it calls "friend" (*hitcakaro*). These friendship-groups have reciprocal duties to perform, the most important of which are those relating to the burial of one another's members. They are expected to show the strictest courtesy to one another, may at times exchange clan names, and are at all time forbidden to intermarry. The friend clan of the Bear is the Wolf and that is why Mr F. was called upon to take charge of the funeral obsequies in this particular case. If it is impossible to obtain a member of the Wolf clan, one of any other clan may be called, and, if even that is impossible, it is permissible to select a member of the Bear clan itself, for, as disagreeable as this may be, it is distinctly less disagreeable than not burying a person or omitting to perform those rites that are essential for the welfare of his soul.

³ Warriors are invited to the wake because, according to Winnebago beliefs, the souls of the enemies they have killed become their slaves in spirit-land and they can order them to take charge of the soul of the recently departed individual, and clear his path of the obstacles that beset him on his journey from the land of the living to that of the spirits. Especially difficult to the passage of the soul is an enormous girdle of fire which it must be carried over to reach the spirit home of its clan. The warrior relates his war experiences, but in so doing he is strongly admonished to be very careful and not tell them in a boastful way or to exaggerate in any detail, for if he does so the soul of the departed would fall into the abyss of fire. In this connection it may perhaps be suggestive to note, that it is not any transgression of the deceased that prevents him from reaching his goal but a transgression of the warrior relating his war experience.

likewise to extend invitations to all who wish to participate in the feast. After the body has been buried, he goes to the home of the deceased and takes away all the household goods that the deceased has been in daily contact with, especially his bed and bedding and his clothes.

In addition to F. another man was sent for, Mr A. W., also a member of the Bear clan. He went through the Bear clan ceremony which was as follows. When the deceased was fully dressed in his Indian clothes and just before he was to be laid in the casket he walked up to him and, taking some paint from a little bundle he carried, he painted a red mark across his forehead, then a black one with charcoal immediately below this one, and finally he daubed his entire chin red. When he was through with this preliminary work he addressed those present as follows:

"You relatives, all that are seated here, I greet you. This ceremony is not anything that we have originated ourselves, but it was known to be the proper thing to do by our ancestors. It is for that reason that I have made the markings upon the face of my son, in order that he may be recognized by his relatives in spirit-land. And I have also given him the material with which he may talk, *i. e.*, tobacco,—that with it he may entreat the spirits to grant all those years that he fell short of¹ to his relatives still living.

"Now, it is said, that the members of the Bear clan hold death as a blessing and not as anything to be mournful over. I do not mean that I do not feel sorry for the children of the deceased and that I rejoice in his death but it is the belief of the members of the Bear clan that the same happiness should come to them at death that comes to us during life when a bear is killed and brought to the village for food.²

"For now indeed my son shall walk with a road that has been cleared from all obstacles; and his claws shall be sharp; and his teeth shall be

¹ The Winnebago believe that the spirits grant to each individual a certain quota of years. By years they do not mean merely the years themselves but all that a normal individual accomplishes in his lifetime, such as the honors he acquires, the scalps he obtains, the food he eats, etc. It is to be noted that there is no belief in any fixed maximum age for mankind but that this maximum varies with each individual and consequently this request for the "unlived increment" of years is as justifiable in the case of an old man as in that of a child.

² According to some, the red marks on the chin are supposed to symbolize the joy of the individual at his death, just as if he were opening his mouth to laugh and his gums were to be seen.

sharp; and nothing indeed shall cross his path. And in this, his walk to the spirit land, he shall tread upon us the life that he has fallen short of upon this earth. And he shall walk just as the original bear clansmen walked, when they originated and when they approached this earth. And now will I sing him the songs that they sang as they came, that he may take them with him in his journey to the spirit land. And it is said that there is no other place prepared for us in the hereafter."

Then he sang the four clan songs.¹

When the songs had been sung, it was just about noon and, as dinner was ready, we all sat down and A. W. filled a pipe and, when he was ready to smoke it, he began to speak again to the following effect:

"Relatives all that are present, I greet you. It is good that this many of you have come here and it is said that the soul of the deceased remains hovering around about this place four days and we should partake of food with him for that period. It is therefore that we do this. And it is good that this many of you relatives have come here and have helped out with the food and dress for the deceased."

He then mentioned the different things that had been given by different individuals. Then he lit the pipe and took a few puffs and sent it around to the left of him. With the pipe he also passed a pitcher of water from which we each took a sip.

During the morning Mrs R. came in and combed the hair of the deceased's wife and likewise gave her a present, telling her that she hoped that through this gift she might be able to dry her tears. Another person also came in the morning bringing a gift of leggings and a blanket for the deceased to wear. He likewise brought the casket. While the body of the deceased was being prepared this person addressed those present as follows:

"Relatives all that are present, I greet you. If my nephews would sit here I would talk to them."

Then the sons of the deceased sat with their mother and sisters. Then the same person continued:

"My sister, it is said that it is best not to weep and that a widow should not mourn too much as the people would then make fun of her;

¹ These songs have been obtained in a different connection and will appear in a subsequent publication.

as well as for the reason that you have children and for their sakes you should look forward to life and live for them. And it is said that we should keep up this (mourning) for at least four years. And indeed there is nothing funny about this that I am going to say, namely that we should not cry, but instead keep up a good spirit. I do not mean that I am glad that my brother-in-law is dead. But even though you may weep, some one might come in and say that it behooves you more to show them your teeth than your tears. By this they mean that you should smile.

"And again it is said that one should not cry, because when a body is laid in the ground there is no more hope of its ever returning again. Now indeed, my nephew, the one that has been advising you in your daily affairs has ceased to breathe and you are the only ones left to look after yourselves, your little brothers, and your mother; and therefore you should love one another and do your mother's bidding."

While we were eating C. P. came in and spoke as follows:

"Relatives, all that are present, I greet you. It is good that you all have come here and are comforting this house of mourning. It is good that J. H. has brought a casket and also brought clothing for the deceased to wear and food for the people to use during the four nights' wake. And indeed he has also promised a hog for the four nights' feast. He did not do this in order that he might boast of it in public but nevertheless how can anyone help oneself in expressing one's thanks. My brother likewise came with the intention of furnishing some of these things but, inasmuch as J. H. has furnished them beforehand, he placed ten dollars in the hands of the deceased's wife. He did not, however, tell her for what purpose he gave her the money and I, therefore, take the liberty of telling her that the gift is meant for anything that she might desire to buy. Now my relatives, this is no time for happiness, but I am glad, nevertheless, that so many of our relatives are present and I am thankful for what you have done. I greet you all."

Then the casket was placed in a spring wagon and taken to the Winnebago cemetery. When we got there the casket was lowered into the grave. When this was over A. W. spoke as follows:

"Relatives you all that are present, I greet you. This many of you have followed my son to this, his last resting place. Further than this, he has ceased to walk in this life. And truly, this many of you have felt sorry for him. All the ceremony that has been taught me I have already said and I have already gone through the same. And I have given him

the emblem and the material to talk with and therefore he will plead for us, his relatives, when he gets to the end of his journey, that we may live the life he fell short of on this earth, and that he may tread firmly upon us, as he walks to the spirit-land. All this I have said before, but nothing was taught me to say at the place where we are now, except that we should step over the grave just as our forefathers did when they originated. They were holy and they entered this life on a perfect day just as this one is today, and, inasmuch as they were holy, all the ground that they touched was also holy and therefore we should step over the grave."

Then we stepped over the grave. We then went to our respective homes.

That same evening the four nights' wake began.¹ When all the invited guests had arrived and were seated, the feast was spread before them. Then A. W. spoke as follows:

"Relatives, all that are seated here, I greet you. It is good that this many of you have come tonight. You know that we are not creating any new ceremony but are simply following up what our forefathers have learned to be true and good. And, as it is said that we should not weep aloud, therefore you will not hear any of us making any utterings of sorrow. And even though we may be silently weeping, should any one come up to us, we will look upon him smiling. We therefore beg of you not to think any the worse of us should you find us happy in mood. And now I am ready to turn over the tobacco and water to J. F. Thus I express my thanks to you all that are present."

Then J. F. took the tobacco and water and spoke as follows:

"Relatives, all that are present seated here, I greet you. It is good that so many of you have come to our humble affair and, as our ancestors have learned that this was the proper way to do, so am I glad that it was given to me to handle the corpse as I am certain that I will be strengthened by it. I will now pass the tobacco to Mr X. He is a brave man and he will light the pipe and pass the water before we eat and after

¹ According to Whitebreast, now deceased, the wake originated as follows. Once upon a time, long ago, a man died and four warriors got together and decided to go to the people of the deceased and comfort them and make them think of other things besides their sorrows. They therefore went to them and told of their war experiences.

The above "explanation" of Whitebreast which Mr Lamere embodies in his notes is unquestionably a fragment of the origin myth of the wake as given by the Bear clan. It does not, however, correspond in any detail to the version told by his nephew and collected by Dr Radin.

supper he will tell the deceased a route to the spirit-land. Now I thank you and I greet you."

Then the brave man took the tobacco and filled the pipe and, after taking a few puffs from it, passed it to the left and it thus went around, each person taking a puff from the pipe and a sip from the pitcher of water. Then the feast began. When it was over and all the dishes were cleared away and every one was properly seated then the brave man greeted them again:

"Relatives, I greet you. As we are not creating anything new and as it has been known to be good by our ancestors and as it is said that if anyone exaggerates a story in a case like this it will cause the soul to stumble, therefore I will tell my war experiences to my relative (the deceased) exactly as I remember them. I greet you all."

He then proceeded to tell his war experiences. When he had finished he spoke as follows:

"Relatives that are present I greet you. As I have said before, I do not wish to cause the soul of my recently deceased relative to stumble and I have tried to tell my story as accurately as I could. It is said that the souls of the ones killed in battle are at the mercy of the victor and I therefore command the souls of the ones I have killed to lead and guide my relative safely through spirit-land. I greet you all."

He then passed the tobacco to another brave man present who in his turn greeted those present and related his war experiences. After two warriors had told their war experiences they stopped for the night, to continue on the second night. The second and third nights were the same as the first. About the evening of the fourth night, when all the people invited were present, A. W. spoke again in the same strain as on the first night, and when he had finished he passed the management of the feast to J. F. The latter then passed it to F. This one now lit the pipe and passed it around together with the water. All partook of the feast then. After supper A. W. reported all the donations that were made to them naming each giver and the amount of the gift and thanking them and praising them for their generous gifts. Then F. told the soul the route it must take in its journey to the spirit land and how it

must behave at different places on the path.¹ Then a warrior told his war experiences and after thanking the people passed the tobacco to the next warrior who in turn related his war experiences.

The amount of gifts was then figured out and they tried to arrange matters so that the warriors were through with their stories about midnight. At midnight games were played with the donations as prizes. The gifts generally consisted of twelve three-yard calico pieces or money equal to that amount of calico, twelve strings of beads, etc. These were the gifts used as prizes. Other donations of food were made for the four nights' feast. A. W. was in charge of the games and he likewise designated what games were to be played. They generally play the games the deceased was fond of, so in this case they played the moccasin game and cards. After all the donations were exhausted and the games finished a brave man was called upon to give a war whoop in thankfulness for the sun who brings the daylight and to all the spirits above and below. Then A. W. greeted the guests again and thanked them for coming and the wake was over.

In olden times the widow was supposed to continue single for four years. She is strongly admonished nevertheless not to continue in low spirits and that she shall consider herself free to act in any way that will make her happy. She is told to play games or dance or in fact do anything that will make her forget her sorrow and that no one will hold her conduct against her as disrespectful to the deceased. As this admonition is given to her by the sister or aunt of her deceased husband, the only people who could properly reproach her, namely the members of her husband's clan, it has all the more weight. This prohibition of weeping is further strengthened by the fact that it is customary to say that any woman who weeps too profusely at the death of her husband is in reality thinking, in the midst of her tears, of the one she is going to marry next. The people will then tell one another not to put themselves out

¹ This story is one of the most famous myths among the Winnebago. In the Nebraska division of the tribe, for some reason or other, F. claims to have the sole right to relate it but most Indians vigorously resent this assumption on F.'s part and there can be little doubt that the right to tell this story belongs to any number of people.

too much as the widow will soon forget her mourning and show no respect to the memory of the dead but instead look after her own pleasures.¹

WITTENBERG, WIS.

¹As another and more complete account of the Winnebago wake is to appear in another place we do not wish to overburden this short sketch with too many notes. It professes to be merely the account of what an eye-witness saw on a single occasion. If there are any variations from what is generally considered as the type, this must be ascribed either to the negligence of those who performed the ceremony or to the existence of a number of different ways of performing it. Compared with other accounts of the wake of the Bear clan, the foregoing sketch contains two notable omissions, first the absence of an address to the body of the deceased as it is lying in state, and secondly the absence of the rites connected with the placing of a stick at the grave of the deceased and the counting of coup on the part of the warriors.

The differences between the wakes of the different clans seem to center principally upon the differences in the clan markings and in the objects buried with the deceased. These objects are generally the specific possessions of the clans. For instance a member of the Thunder clan is always buried with a Thunderbird club (na^mmantce) and a member of the Bear clan with the stick emblematic of his power as a soldier and which is known as na^mmañixinñiñi.